

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANA 4347

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, ECON, SCUL, MASS
SUBJECT: TOUR D'HORIZON WITH PRESIDENT AL-HAMDI

BEGIN SUMMARY. DURING DEC. 8 TOUR D' HORIZON WITH PRESIDENT
AL-HAMDI, HE REITERATED BEST WISHES TO PRESIDENT-ELECT
CARTER WHILE EXPRESSING HOPE FOR EXPANDED AND MORE DIRECT
RELATIONSHIP WITH USG AS NEW ADMINISTRATION TAKES OVER.
AL-HAMDI ALSO HOPED THAT THE NEW ADMINISTRATION WOULD TAKE
ADVANTAGE OF EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY TO SETTLE PALESTINE
QUESTION. MORE HIGH-RANKING VISITORS, INCREASED COMMERCIAL
ACTIVITY AND EXPANDED CULTURAL CONTACTS WOULD GO A LONG WAY
TO DEMONSTRATE TO AL-HAMDI USG DESIRE ALSO TO
DEEPEN FURTHER CURRENT EXCELLENT US/YEMENI RELATIONS.
END SUMMARY.

1. ON EVENING OF DECEMBER 8 I DELIVERED TO PRESIDENT
AL-HAMDI PRESIDENT-ELECT CARTER'S THANK YOU LETTER
IN RESPONSE TO AL-HAMDI'S CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE ON THE
OCCASION OF CARTER'S ELECTION VICTORY. AFTER THE
USUAL PLEASANTRIES, I TOOK THE OCCASION TO ENGAGE
WITH PRESIDENT AL-HAMDI ON A TOUR D'HORIZON OF BILATERAL
AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AS THIS WAS MY FIRST PRIVATE CALL
ON HIM SINCE MY RETURN FROM HOME-LEAVE IN MID-SEPTEMBER.
ALSO PRESENT WAS CHIEF-OF-STAFF AHMAD AL-GHASHMI.
PRESIDENT AL-HAMDI BEGAN BY REITERATING HIS BEST
WISHES TO PRESIDENT-ELECT CARTER AND HIS HOPE THAT
THE US WILL NOW EMBARK ON A NEW PHASE IN ITS INTER-
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NATIONAL RELATIONS TO DEMONSTRATE ONCE AGAIN AMERICA'S LEADER-

SHIP OF THE FREE WORLD. HE EMPHASIZED THAT YEMEN PRIZES ITS GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE US WHICH HAS ALWAYS SYMBOLIZED DEMOCRACY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FOR THE REST OF THE WORLD AND ESPECIALLY FOR YEMENIS. PRESIDENT AL-HAMDI SAID THAT THE YARG REALIZES THAT THE US HAS MANY MORE IMPORTANT CONCERNS THAN ITS BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP WITH YEMEN BUT THAT NONETHELESS HE AND HIS GOVERNMENT LOOK TO THE NEW ADMINISTRATION FOR CLOSER RELATIONS BETWEEN YEMEN AND THE US, STRESSING THAT YEMEN CURRENTLY HAS EXCELLENT RELATIONS WITH SAUDI ARABIA WHERE THE USG HAS PRIMARY INTERESTS. AL- HAMDI CONTINUED THAT IT IS IMPORTANT, HOWEVER, FOR THE USG ALSO TO APPRECIATE YEMEN'S POSITION IN THE PENINSULA, DESPITE THE FACT THAT YEMEN MAY LACK THE NATURAL RESOURCES TO PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE AT THIS TIME.

3. AL-HAMDI WENT ON TO SAY THAT YEMEN FINDS ITSELF BETWEEN TWO CONFLICTING CURRENTS. ON THE NORTH A POWERFUL AND RICH NEIGHBOR WHICH IS ABLE TO DO OR HAVE ANYTHING IT WANTS AND WITH WHICH YEMEN MUST HAVE CLOSE RELATIONS BOTH FOR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC REASONS. YET, THE DISCREPANCY BETWEEN THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE NORTH AND THAT OF YEMEN CREATES TENSIONS IN YEMEN WITH ITS LARGE AND IMPOVERISHED POPULATION. AT THE SAME TIME, ON THE SOUTH YEMEN IS BORDERED BY A MARXIST STATE WHICH IS ATTEMPTING TO DEMONSTRATE TOTHE ARABS IN GENERAL AND TO YEMEN IN PARTICULAR THAT MODERATION AND WESTERN STYLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WILL LEAD NOWHERE. THE LEFTIST REGIME IN ADEN MUST ALSO BE VIEWED AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF THE RISE OF THE LEFTIST REGIMES IN SOMALIA AND NOW IN ETHIOPIA. THUS, YEMEN IS BEING SUBJECTED TO COUNTER- VAILING REGIONAL INFLUENCES WHICH REQUIRE A STRONG CENTRAL GOVERNMENT IN SANA, ABLE TO BRING ABOUT ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT.

4. AL-HAMDI CONTINUED THAT YEMEN IS NOT ASKING FOR LARGE AMOUNTS OF ASSISTANCE FROM THE US BUT RATHER WOULD LIKE FURTHER TANGIBLE INDICATIONS OF US SUPPORT FOR THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT HERE AND PARTICULARLY THE

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ESTABLISHMENT OF A CLOSER AND MORE DIRECT BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP IN ADDITION TO THE TRILATERAL RELATIONSHIP NOW EXISTING BETWEEN YEMEN, SAUDI ARABIA AND THE US. AL-HAMDI HASTENED TO ADD THAT THIS BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP SHOULD NOT BE AT THE EXPENSE OF THE TRILATERAL ONE BUT RATHER SHOULD COMPLEMENT IT. AL-HAMDI DID NOT DWELL ON SPECIFICS BUT NOTED (AS HE HAS MANY TIMES IN THE PAST) THAT YEMEN WOULD LIKE INTER ALIA TO SEE

EARLIER DELIVERIES OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT, AS WELL AS MORE ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL CONTACTS.

5. I RESPONDED THAT THE USG PLACES GREAT VALUE ON ITS BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP WITH YEMEN AND THAT I PERSONALLY HAVE BEEN TRYING TO DEEPEN THIS RELATIONSHIP IN THE TWO YEARS OF MY ASSIGNMENT HERE. (HE INTERRUPTED TO SAY HE FULLY APPRECIATED US EFFORTS THUS FAR, BUT THAT HE WAS SIMPLY EMPHASIZING THE NEED FOR A FURTHER DEEPENING.) I ASSURED HIM THAT BOTH THE US AND SAUDI ARABIA REALIZE THE VALUE OF YEMEN TO THE PEACE AND STABILITY OF THE PENINSULA AND THAT BOTH ARE WORKING TOGETHER WITH THE YARG TO BRING ABOUT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AS WELL AS MILITARY MODERNIZATION HERE. MOREOVER, AS A RESULT OF THE RECENT VISIT OF DEPSECDEF CLEMENTS, DELIVERIES OF SOME IMPORTANT EQUIPMENT HAVE BEEN SPEEDED UP. WITH REGARD TO THE LATTER, I POINTED OUT THAT THERE IS ALSO THE QUESTION OF THE ABSORPTIVE CAPACITY OF THE YEMENI ARMY. MEANWHILE, WE ARE ALL WORKING TOGETHER IN ORDER TO PROVIDE QUICKLY BOTH EQUIPMENT AND TRAINING FOR THE YEMENI ARMY SUITABLE TO ITS PRESENT NEEDS AND CAPABILITIES.

6. AL-HAMDI CONCLUDED THE DISCUSSION BY POINTING OUT THAT PRESIDENT-ELECT CARTER HAS AN EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY TO SETTLE THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION NOW THAT THERE ARE MODERATE LEADERS IN EGYPT AND SYRIA. AL-HAMDI EXPRESSED THE SINCERE HOPE THAT THIS OPPORTUNITY WILL NOT BE LOST BECAUSE SUCH A SETTLEMENT WILL HAVE A POSITIVE EFFECT THROUGHOUT THE ARAB WORLD.

7. COMMENT: AL-HAMDI AND OTHERS IN THE YARG HAVE LONG BEEN ADVOCATING A MORE "DIRECT RELATIONSHIP"
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BETWEEN WASHINGTON AND SANA. YEMENI SENSIBILITIES BEING WHAT THEY ARE, AL-HAMDI AND THE OTHERS RESENT BEING TREATED BY USG AS A MERE APPENDAGE OF SAUDI ARABIA. AT THE SAME TIME THEY ARE PRAGMATIC ENOUGH TO APPRECIATE THE CURRENT POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC REALITIES OF THE PENINSULA. NONETHELESS, THERE ARE THINGS WHICH WE CAN DO TO DEMONSTRATE OUR "DIRECT" INTEREST IN YEMEN. THESE WOULD INCLUDE MORE HIGH-RANKING VISITORS HERE, INCREASED COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES (PERHAPS A TRADE MISSION), AND, OF COURSE, EXPANDED CULTURAL CONTACTS, ESPECIALLY IN THE FORM OF SCHOLARSHIP AND FELLOWSHIP ASSISTANCE. AS WE HAVE SAID SO OFTEN IN THE PAST, A LITTLE BIT CAN GO A LONG WAY IN YEMEN.
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